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http://www.kokomotribune.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-walkable-kokomo/article_d530bd6e-25ac-11e6-b931-af07ea4dfe1e.html

Editorial: Walkable Kokomo

When Jeff Speck, best-selling author of “Walkable City: How Downtown can Save America One Step at a Time,” took the stage last week at Indiana University Kokomo’s Kresge Auditorium, one of his biggest fans was in attendance: Mayor Greg Goodnight.

Our mayor has a passion for this subject area, which has manifested itself in a myriad of foot-friendly innovations in our downtown. Speck’s focus on walking instead of driving may seem like a strange fit for an automotive town like Kokomo, but the results speak for themselves.

One innovation taken to heart here in Kokomo is also a development for which Speck has been a champion: road diets. Locals have been skeptical, at times loudly so, but the research bears out the fact that these do increase safety.

Instead of having double lanes in each direction, the idea here is to narrow the road by using the center lane for something other than a left passing lane. This decreases the speeding mentality by forcing drivers to pay more attention and drive more slowly.

And if you think it's expensive to fix your car after hitting a flower bed or raised median, just imagine how much cheaper it is than a head-on collision.

Once you've got people out of their cars, you've got to give them reasons to stay there. In essence, if you want nice things in your city, you're going to have to put them there yourself.

Just think of all the improvements made in recent years to our city's core: from the new Y building, to the baseball stadium, to the Industrial Heritage Trail.

As Speck put it, there are four requirements for making the walk enticing, that it be: useful, safe, comfortable and interesting. Though we are improving all the time as a city, we've come a long way to attaining that goal.